The Student Journal of Art and Literature

Vol. XVIII Spring 2021

CALLIOPE

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Volume XVIII - Spring 2021

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Our thank you also goes to the many students who submitted their creative efforts for consideration. It is only through their courage and diligence that *Calliope* continues to materialize. We received many fine works this year but were limited in the number of entries we could publish. We hope, however, that students will persist in submitting their works to future editions of Calliope.

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Student submissions are welcomed from September through February each year at Calliope@nvcc.edu. Submission guidelines are available at http://www.nvcc.edu/calliope. *Calliope* reserves the right to reprint and present submitted works on the *Calliope* website and other media. Students interested in joining the *Calliope* staff as interns should contact the editors at the address above.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Last spring there was a brief resolve to abandon the publication of this year's Calliope. The world was in stasis, anguished at what it was leaving, uncertain what lay ahead. Yet joy survived. The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us all that there can be no beautiful lotus flower without mud. How true. When we think of the value we now place on detecting a smile only in a person's eyes and the bond shared from communal suffering—regardless of the degree—perhaps we move closer to understanding the beauty of all creation and the worth of the smallest kindnesses. The contributors of this year's Calliope are torch bearers for us all, reminding us that life goes on and that no level of suffering can destroy the creative spirit. We should applaud the writers and artists in this issue for sharing their creativity despite the hardships we all have experienced in the last year. Thank them for laying before us their individual lotuses.

Til Turner

Til Turner

March 2021

calliope *kal<e>i:opi. U.S. (Gr. Kallioph)*

(beautiful-voiced), the ninth of the Muses,
presiding over eloquence and heroic poetry.

1. An instrument consisting of a series of
steam-whistles toned to produce musical notes,
played by a keyboard like that of an organ;

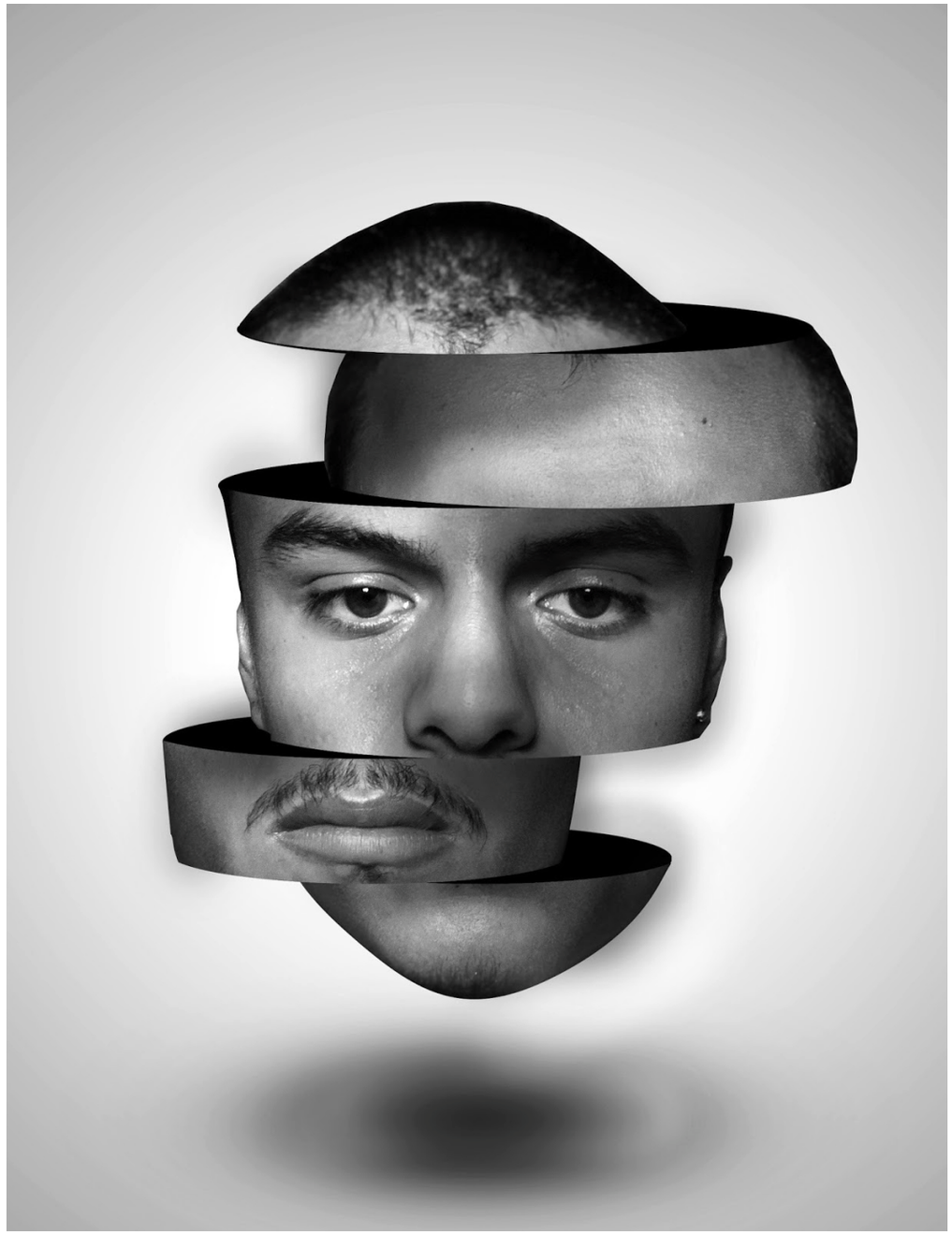
2. attrib. calliope hummingbird,
a hummingbird, sellula ***calliope***, of the
Western United States and Mexico.
Oxford English Dictionary

First Prize - Artwork

Xavier Reyes

Sliced Self-Portrait

Digitally Altered Photograph



Second Prize - Artwork

Nicole Chandler

Piano Smile

Ink and Graphite on Paper

First Prize - Poetry

Fiona Mustard

For The Böldersmårten

I want to file taxes with you.

What I mean is:
I want to keep waking up before pink-polluted dawn loads pixels on the horizon
to drink bitter coffee with you in our dark kitchenette.
I want to go to work so we can make our biweekly couch payments,
so we have somewhere to sit and hold each other while our bedsheets are in the dryer.
Because I like splitting meatballs with you at the furniture store,
And I like wrangling Böldersmårtens into our hatchback every few months when we get tired of
winding between teetering towers of paperbacks.

I like scrubbing the tiles on the bathroom floor so your showered feet stay clean.
I want to file taxes with you.

There are definitely other ways to say this,
But the more conventional phrases sound vague and ephemeral and twee,
and you and I live and die in the visceral, the concrete, the finite.
So, I ask you, one practical soul to another, if you'll file taxes with me
this year—and the next,
whether there's a bull market—or a bear,
whether we blow our savings on vacations—or medical bills.

Will you file taxes with me?

Because I would rather sit with you,
neck-deep in ballpoint pens—colorless sticky-notes—cryptic bank statements—
panning for last year's receipts—
Than be flush with cash and loose in a bookstore,
or "habite"-ing artistically above a Parisian bakery.
With anyone else.
With no one at all.

I want to file taxes with you more than I want birdsong at dawn and a good tax man by

February.
I want to file taxes with you more than signed first editions and fondant-free wedding cakes.
And yes, this is also the fiscally responsible choice—for you, for me,
for our newly-assembled Böldersmårten with its whole shelf-life ahead of it—
But helplessly, artlessly, honestly—I just want to file taxes with you.

And I have to know:

Do you want to file taxes with me too?

Third Prize - Artwork

Caitlyn Raymond

Blue Night Reflections

Oil on Canvas

First Prize - Fiction

Ashlynne Doyle

The Funniest Thing Happened Before You Called

God orders an Old-fashioned. After the drink arrives, he leans over the bar and snags a pink cocktail sword, stabs the orange peel in his drink, and stirs. Ice clinks incessantly against the rocks glass before he stops, removes the sword, and laps up the droplets that gather on its surface. He wipes off the sword with a napkin and sheathes it back in the cup he pulled it from.

"You can't do that," I say.

He shrugs. "They'll never know."

I wonder if hitting him is worth the possibility of eternal damnation, if he's telling the truth about the God thing. I reason that it might be, for a good swing.

God gives me no further time to ponder the matter. He turns on his stool to face me. "I'll ask you again," he says. "What's a guy like you doing here?" A cigar returns to the corner of his mouth and he gives it a good suck, the thing becoming a makeshift torch between his glistening lips.

He doesn't really look like God. His ebony face is deeply wrinkled, and his clothes are threadbare and smell like wet garbage. I don't remember him sitting down. He just… appeared. The dim blue light of the bar gives his eyes an eerie glow.

"Listening to some old timer claim he created the universe, I guess." I'm playing with the ring box in my pocket. The corners and weight of it intrigue my restless fingertips, as though the answers to all my lingering questions could be found etched somewhere on its surface.

He laughs. "You're really gonna make me spend my only break debating my existence?" He balances the cigar and rocks glass in one massive hand and takes a sip.

"I thought you took Sundays off."

"If only that were true. Nah, I've only got a couple more minutes, and then it's back to the grind."

"Do you come down pretty often, then? To Earth?"

He takes a drag off his cigar. "Not the meddling type, myself. Now, there are those who don't share in my beliefs, but I'm of the mind that if you can't trust your creation to exist without your help, well, it's not a good creation."

"Are there more of… your kind?"

God smiles, but doesn't answer. I take a drink. The box in my pocket taunts me. My thumb pushes against the lid and the box suddenly snaps shut. It pinches my finger, hard. I retract my hand and swear, the pad of my thumb striped red and white.

"Whatcha got there?" God asks jovially.

"Nothin'," I mutter.

"Must be something, if it hurts that much."

"I didn't mean for it to hurt me."

God knocks back another gulp. "Wanna talk about it?"

I stare at the lime drifting in my glass. Dark green, slightly bruised. "Really, I don't want to talk to nobody tonight."

"Good thing I'm somebody, then, huh?"

A bartender walks by and grabs a plastic cocktail sword. Pink, like the one God used. I think about saying something but she walks away.

"You know," I say, "I'd be more inclined to believe you're who you say you are if you proved it."

"Proved it?"

"Like a miracle. Water into wine or something like that."

"You want wine? Bartender's right there." God shakes his head. "Evidence eliminates a need for faith. Who is she?"

"Who?"

"This woman you keep thinking about. The reason you came out here."

I grab my glass. "She's nobody."

God slaps the counter. "So, it is a woman! Damn, I'm good."

"I thought you weren't supposed to swear. Being pious, and all."

He waves a dismissive hand. "Common misconception. I'm what you want me to be. That's why you see me as homeless, because you wanted to see someone more destitute than you."

The tips of my ears grow hot. "I'm not a bad person."

"What's more destitute than a poor man with a broken heart than a poor man with nothing at all? Speaking of…" God pats himself down, searching for something. "Ah. I was afraid of that. No wallet." He gives me an unconcerned shrug and takes another drink.

My fists ball my lap. "This isn't about my broken heart."

"And yet, here you are, at a bar on a Thursday night, drinking your troubles away. You came out here looking for something to help. Am I wrong?"

I look at him, then back to my drink. My fists uncoil as I hang my head. "No."

He leans forward. "If she's got you this messed up, go call her."

"It's not that easy."

"Sure it is."

"Maybe if you paid attention to your creation, you would know why I can't." I pull the ring box from my pocket and put it on the counter. "See that? That's three years of love. And what does she tell me when I get down on knee? Does she make my wildest dreams come true? No. She runs. Calls me that night and tells me that we're moving too fast, that she never wanted anything serious." I look at my lime again. "I wish she could feel exactly what I feel right now. It's… It's like a ten-car pile-up on I-64, and I'm in the middle with my chest ripped open, all mangled by the steel and glass around me. It's like dying slow enough for your soul to feel every other part of you die first."

God takes this all in quietly, blowing smoke rings. "Tough break," he says finally.

"That's all you have to say?!"

"I can't change the past. What's done is done."

I laugh without humor and slam my gin and tonic. “Some god you are.”

“Eh. Can’t win them all.” God finishes his cigar and reaches for an abandoned ash tray to smash it in. “Tell you what, though. Would you mind spotting me a twenty? Last time I left here without paying, the bartender pitched a real fit.”

“You harass me, get me to pour my heart out to you, then tell me ‘tough break’ and expect me to pay for your drink?”

“Well, when you put it like that…”

“Not a chance in Hell.”

“Ah, c’mon, man.” God turns his head one way, then another, as though thinking. “How about this: I’m feeling pretty comfortably drunk right now. You want me to prove I’m God?”

I look him up and down, wrinkling my nose. “…What are you going to do?”

“Cover my bill, and I’ll change one thing about you or your life. I don’t usually meddle, mind you, but if you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”

I cross my arms over my chest. “You expect me to trust you?”

“If I can stand by that rainbow stuff, I can stand by a little thing like this.” He sticks out a gloved hand. “You wanna change your life tonight or what?” I stare into the face of God, trying to find the lie to betray his words. That self-contented smile gives nothing away. It only agitates the wrinkles on his face.

I don’t shake his hand. I do, however, pull my wallet from my back pocket and slap a twenty-dollar bill on the counter.

God grabs it. “Ah, Jackson. A sight for sore eyes.”

“A deal’s a deal.”

“…Right.” God looks back at me. “So…?”

I think for a long moment. “I wish Lydia knew exactly how I felt. But I mostly want to have never known her at all.”

“…Really?” God asks. “No wealth beyond your wildest dreams? World peace?” I rub my head. “Just get rid of Lydia, okay?”

God regards me in silence. Then he glances away, cracking his neck in both directions. “Alright.”

I don’t feel any different. I still yearn for her. “…How long does it take?”

“It’s already done.”

“Yeah, but I feel the same.”

“Because you didn’t change.” God eyes the wall clock with a sigh.

“Well, what did you do?”

God slams the remainder of his drink. “Got rid of Lydia. Like you asked.”

Something about the way he says it doesn’t sit well with me. “What did you do?”

He stands from the bar. “I gotta get back to work,” he says. “Tip the bartender well for me, ‘kay?”

“What did you—?”

I blink. He’s gone. I stand up, scan the crowd, but he’s disappeared into thin air.

“Doing okay over here?”

I turn back. The bartender is leaning on the counter, smiling politely.

I swallow the lump in my throat. “Did you happen to see where that guy sitting with me went?”

She shakes her head. “Sorry.”

I sink back into my seat and pull my phone out of my pocket. I dial Lydia’s number by heart. The phone rings, and rings. No answer. I have only just begun to wrap my head around the horrible gravity of what I have done when I get the first call about the accident.

Bayadir Abdulmohsin

Unknown

Mixed Media on Paper

Leilani Nieves

Leilani

Acrylic on Paper

First Prize - Nonfiction

Thayer Cumings

The Hunter's Moon

The air outside stuck pins into my skin. It was dark, even with the faint light of the setting sun and rising moon. I could not see what creatures lurked behind each passing tree or bush. My small feet crunched the dead leaves beneath me as though they were bones crumbling under too much pressure. The graveyard I stood in seemed on stretch for miles, partially hidden under a dense layer of fog.

Suddenly, a child's laugh pulled me from my haze, and I glanced around at my decorated front lawn; the lawn that was no longer miles wide, but the familiar square of grass and trees. Styrofoam gravestones littered the yard, joined by plastic skeletons, grotesque monsters, and the occasional bodiless head, all of which were covered in smoke from the hidden fog machines.

It was October thirty-first, Halloween night.

The sun had finally set on my little world, marking the start of my favorite night of the year. The blue ball gown I wore swished at my feet with every step I took. I was six years old and dressed as Cinderella, complete with a tiara, and several layers of warm clothes beneath my dress. I attempted to sneak back to the front steps of my house to take a piece of candy, but my mom caught me before I could.

"Thayer! Get your hand out of that candy bowl before I take it out for you." I took the threat seriously, and slunk away from the treasure.

"Mommy," I whined, my voice pitched high, "I wanna go trick-or-treating now!"

She glanced at me with a heavy sigh, then noticed the group of children walking up our driveway. A smile lit up her face. "Watch them!"

I turned to face the group of kids. They were dressed in scary costumes, or as characters I had never seen before. One boy, dressed as a ninja, led the group.

"Oh I'm not scared!" he boasted, stomping up the driveway with swagger. "This isn't even that scary, guys. Come on! I'll go up without you."

The handful of kids following him trailed slowly behind, taking in all of the flashing lights illuminating the front yard and the spooky sounds coming from the speakers in our open windows. This was my mommy's cue.

She let out a loud and evil cackle, embodying the witch she was dressed as. "Come on up, little children! You want your candy, do you not? Well, you must make the journey to me if you want your prize!"

I giggled from my spot next to her, sitting on the steps that led to my front door. The group of kids appeared terrified; even the leader of the bunch hesitated. In that moment, my daddy stepped out from his hiding spot behind a tree directly next to the children.

"BUAHAHAHAHA!"

The children screamed and threw their arms up in terror, candy falling from their

treat bags. It took no time at all for the group to run back down the driveway and make a sharp turn down the road. I did not attempt to contain my laughter.

My daddy turned to me, but I was unable to see his face. The mask he wore was monstrous and deformed. Fake blood oozed in thick drops, and plastic bone poked through the slashed skin. He wore a tall tophat over the mask, giving the illusion that he was even taller than his natural, six-foot-four frame. He was utterly terrifying, a true nightmare come to life, but I knew it was my daddy hiding under a costume.

"What are you laughing at, Princess?" he asked me, his voice still the same even with his disguise on.

I continued to giggle, recalling the face of the young boy who believed himself to be unshakeable. "That was really funny, daddy!"

"Oh was it?" He walked over and kneeled next to me, moving his mask just enough so I could see his face. "I will take you out trick-or-treating shortly, okay?"

"Okay," I responded, not quite as impatient as I had been moments before. "I can wait a bit longer, I guess."

Mommy spoke up then. "Bert! Incoming!"

Daddy pulled his mask back on, and just like that, he was a hunter in search of his prey. I knew he was grinning, I could hear the excitement in his voice. "Watch this, Princess," he said before ducking behind another bush, waiting for the next group of children to walk up.

Over the following several years, I grew up and aged out of trick-or-treating. As a teenager, the opportunities I was permitted to experience opened many new doors: I helped my dad when he would decorate the yard; I joined my parents on the trips they took to haunted houses; and I even worked with paid actors scaring people on a haunted trail. The older I grew, the more involved I became on my favorite holiday, but nothing compared to the night of Halloween itself, the night I was allowed to stay up late and scare kids all on my own.

I embraced the chill of the October breeze, clad in only a thin jacket to increase my mobility. I moved silently between props, the boots I wore leaving no trail in their wake. This Halloween, I had ditched the princess gown and sparkly slippers for my all black attire and a full face of makeup that gave the impression of sunken, dead skin.

Nights like these were special; I did not subject myself to the cold for little reason.

Horror music played from the same speakers as they always had, sitting in the same window sills they never left. My palms sweat as adrenaline coursed through my veins. I crouched in the low hanging branches of a tree, invisible in the black of night. My hiding spot was directly next to the sidewalk spanning the front of my house, connecting my driveway to my neighbor's. In my position, I was not aiming to scare kids before they got to the candy; I would wait until they were leaving my home—believing themselves to be in the clear—to scare them.

From behind me, near the main entrance of my home, I heard a child scream. The laughter that escaped my mom's lips was shrill and evil. She forced herself to remain in character, but still allowed herself the satisfaction of releasing her amusement.

I knew that meant the children would be walking by me soon. I was holding the base of the tree as I crouched to keep my balance. Several branches dug uncomfortably into my thinly covered skin, but as I watched the superheroes and princesses walking along the sidewalk with their respected adults, I felt myself push deeper into the sharp wood.

As the children neared, my body calmed. The restlessness seemed to evaporate out of my body, and I reared myself back. I sucked the cold air deeply into my lungs, watched, and listened.

"That was so scary!" Captain America yelled, a pillowcase heavy with candy in his grasp. They were several yards away from me.

"That big man," Sleeping Beauty started, "He was dressed like a bush!"

One of the adults laughed. They continued their approach. "That was a ghillie suit, he used it so he could hide in the big trees."

A power ranger finally spoke up, and he was right in front of me. "He didn't even hide that good, I could see him from a mile away. They didn't scare me!"

I stood to my full height and threw myself out from the tree. "But I did!"

Several piercing shrieks rang out into the dark night. Not only did the small group of children scream, but even the parents let out shouts of fear. One woman shoved the man she stood next to in front of her, towards my hiding place. The children dropped their candy bags and ran on down the sidewalk, abandoning their parents.

"Oh my goodness," one of the adult women exclaimed as I backed into my concealed location once again. "I think I just peed a little."

I slapped my hand over my mouth to cover my giggles. Pride swelled in my chest knowing that I scared the woman so truly.

The group of trick-or-treaters continued on, and I heard the sound of young screams coming from the yard behind me. I looked at the sky, noticing the moon half hidden in the light cloud cover. I crouched in the branches once again; a hunter waiting patiently for its prey.

Jihyun Song

Juicy Cherry

Watercolor

Safia Guergaf

BLM Custom T-Shirt

Digital Design

Second Prize - Poetry

Natalya Green

January's Pumpkins

I have small pumpkins
on my desk
adopted late October.
Overtime their colors
have grown dark,
stained yellow and green.

They still hold their place
on my desk
next to miscellaneous trinkets,
I have no use for
yet can't discard.

Their departure
is long overdue,
well needed,
or maybe their spot
on my desk is displaced
in late January.

Their colors,
not blending
with the cold look of winter,
disordered
next to barren trees
and empty air.

Maybe in my fantasy,
they dwell perfectly on this surface,
never needing to move,
stagnant in this frigid air,

the only use
they serve,
being a haunt of my past,
lingering moments,
tormented innocence,
the loss of my youth
I am unable to let go of.
They may rot,
grow moist with fungus,
become discolored,
but even then,
I can't muster
the energy
to throw them out

So they'll sit,
still on my desktop,
no matter what month it is
no matter how long it takes
until their use
dissipates.

Campbell Conrad

Seasonal Sadness

Digital Design

Second Prize - Fiction

Jeremiah Thomas

A Queen of Seven Suns

The insolence.

It's tonight, then. The jade vase has fallen in the conservatory by the east wall; a slight scratching sound can be heard as her companion tries to file open a lock. There's little doubt that she's already making her way to the kitchen. I grip my knife tightly; the thought that anyone--let alone her--could be so impossibly misguided sickens me to my stomach.

With a snap of my fingers, the glass tubing beside my bed erupts with the dim amber light of the Fourth Sun. My eyes open only to confirm what I already knew; the brightly colored silk curtains remain unblemished by her orange robes. A sigh of relief. There's time.

I reach for my necklace, buried deep in the folds of my nightgown, and begin to leaf through the various trinkets. Beyond the keepsakes of old lovers and signets of this or that kingdom is a relative trifle: a small, brass key. It feels strange for it to leave my skin for the first time in decades; I ponder this as my tiny ivory chest is opened.

Inside are three objects: a small vial, a dagger of delicate rosestone, and a folded letter. I put the first two in my pockets with practiced efficiency. Tears well in my eyes as I open the third; the impending knowledge of tonight's meaning weighs like a sword over my head. I capture the part of myself that weeps and stuff it somewhere deep.

"Dearest Mahiya,

I cannot in any good conscience allow you to continue along the path which possesses you so ferociously. To commit murder of such a classification is gravely misguided, and I fear I may no longer count you among mine should you continue. I urge you to return to us and reconsider.

May the Suns shine ever upon you,

-Lungi Lokhrotto"

My eyes have scarcely left his name when the telltale rustling of winds and curtains echoes behind me. I do not need to turn to know the assailant.

"You should know why I'm here," she says, her words heavy with the weight of storm winds. "In accordance with the Rites of Haryomen, I am compelled to grant you dying words, tyrant. To grant you such a mercy may not please the ears of my compatriots, yet I do so regardless. You may speak."

I sigh, momentarily. She will grant me this much.

"I thank you," I say, "for you have kept me on my toes these many years. Such efforts have deterred many a lesser assassin."

I sense her draw her weapon closer to my neck in response. "You think me but an assassin? It must be irony to know that I am descended from those you sought to destroy." I can sense her adopt a more regal posture. "No, I am she called Mahiya of

the Hours, heiress of Lleyden, thirteenth to my name. You would do well to remember this before your extinction."

"Very well. You have bested me," I say, dropping my metal knife to the ground. "But, answer me a trifle, would you?"

She grunts in assent, no doubt assuring she may silence me quickly.

"After I am dead, what then? Who shall unite the keepers of the Hours and the Rays and the Reeds? What will pass for order in this land?"

"The deed shall be done. One with the requisite wisdom shall take the throne."

I scoff. "Do you fancy yourself a queen, young lady?"

"I fancy myself naught but a deliverer of righteousness."

"Some righteousness you're delivering," I say dryly.

"The time for wordplay is over. I came here for a purpose."

"A pity," I say, heaving a sigh that, surprising myself, is genuine. "Tell me, what would Lungi Lokhrotto say?"

The name of her precious comrade is enough to startle her. In the space it takes for her to gasp, I make my move.

A push in realms unseen is all it takes to uncouple myself from the stream of the world. I am unburdened and untethered from the limitations of the flow of time. Before she can spout forth another of her forsaken accusations, I stand and turn to face my frozen attacker, dagger drawn. Her robes are stained a brighter orange than I remember, and in her hands is the same rosestone dagger which I now hold against her. Illuminated dimly by the Fourth Sun, no facet of her escapes me even as I hold her frozen. The nose, slightly too large. The birthmark on the neck. The face, not yet scarred by the years.

She is so young.

I loosen my hold on the flow and she resumes, breathing a familiar gasp as she perceives me to have leapt across the room in no time at all. She pauses to inspect my robes, my dagger. My nose, slightly too large. The birthmark on my neck. My face, scarred by the years. Her eyes widen.

"You-- then--"

"Tell me again, girl, do you fancy yourself a Queen?"

"I--I fancy myself--a deliverer of--"

"Righteousness," I say, the word leaving my mouth like poison to be spit out. My robes do not befit a Queen, but they will do. "Speak to me of righteousness when warlords ravage the land. When the temples lie in ruin. When fathers turn against their sons. Speak to me of Righteousness when you do not mean its other name: Chaos."

She begins to quiver; I know this to mean that she uncouples herself from the flow to gain herself precious moments of thought. What I see are merely the natural movements of the body, given speed. Her eyes remain clouds of steel rain through it all.

When her quivering stops, I see that some of that rain has spilled out onto her cheeks.

"All these years," she says, "I have wondered what sort of monster would become you. A Queen of Seven Suns. A tyrant. A killer. A murderer. A demon." She pauses to wipe several years of hatred off of her cheeks. "I see now that it is someone with determination. Someone who is convinced that they are right."

"There is still time for you," I say.

She backs towards the window, her dagger still drawn. "I…I will return, one day. When I am more knowledgeable. And I will judge you for your crimes. And when you are judged… the people of this land will know justice."

"I am sure."

With a puff of wind, she vanishes into the night, and her footsteps trail off quickly into the east conservatory. I know that she will not return for some time.

It pains me, knowing that I was once so insolent. So ignorant. So misguided. Even so, those very qualities shall be what make her into the Queen who reigns over seven realms. I only wish her…or, perhaps, my…path had been easier.

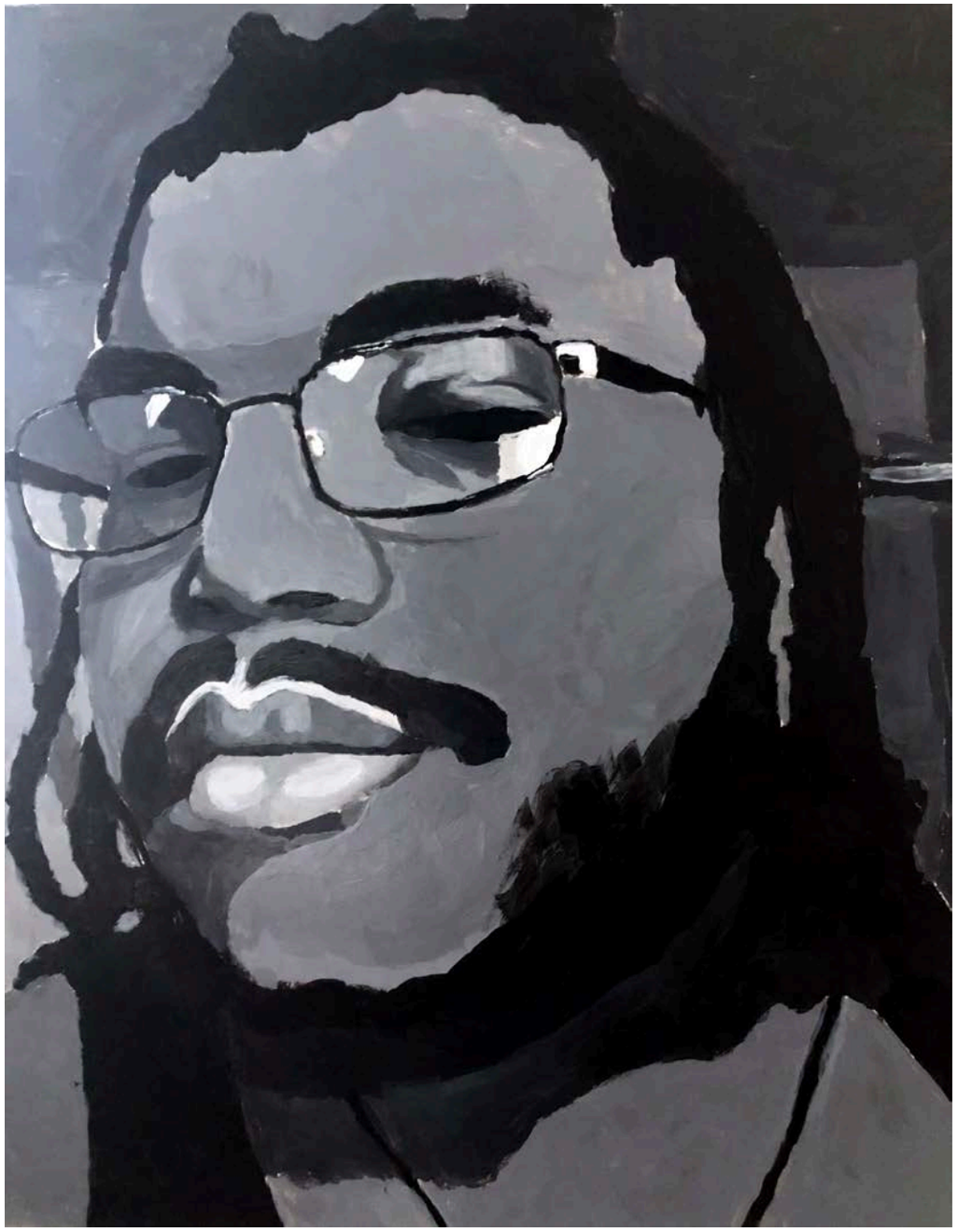
Opening the ivory box once more, I place the vial and dagger back inside it, and look over the letter one final time.

Pools of steel rain begin to wet the paper as the sun-lamp goes dark.

Marcus Brown

Grisaille

Acrylic on Paper



Second Prize - Nonfiction

Robert Briden

Diamonds

Twice now and way more times than that have I tried to give up on missing people. Those people who were closest to me are so hard not to cry over when I realize they are no longer key components of my life and the deeper the memory of most recent regurgitation, the harder it is to look at it without despair.

Sometimes I feel like I'm overreacting. But my biggest concern is that they don't care. I fear they never cared. I believe it never mattered and that might scare me most.

Maybe I'm a passing thought in their lives. I like to think that they may miss me. If they don't, so be it. Who am I to them anymore anyway? Nothing but a memory as they seem to be to me.

I'd like to think they're the base of who I am today, that I have been shaped by the past. I should let go. Or should I hold on? Either way is painful. Both feel impossible.

That gives memories a convenient feel. All I have are the memories of which are totems in time. Some are beautiful, others distraught. They're pillars of life which I can't cut down, though I may leave them to oxidate, they're stuck standing in the lands of history and hold structure to buildings that once bustled with activity. Maybe those buildings are still active with new people whose presence brings on life that supports the buildings as thoroughly as the past.

To learn from the past is probably the most valuable option in the longstanding showdown between me and my memories. I wish I could repeat the past sometimes, but then I wonder why I would want to. I'd want to do things differently, do things the right way as I look back on the wrongs. But what's the difference between then and now other than the people? Why not act in the way now that you think you should've then? There'd be less regret in that sense, and greater exploration, discovery of possibility. It's difficult not to think to myself "won't I just be building memories of which I will look down upon with despair as I realize they're no longer for me to take part in?"

Everything changes. Why would you want things to stay the same? Everything feels virtually the same anyway, so why not recharge, refresh? Let it breathe because it could stop breathing at any moment. You won't always be happy about it, but why would you want to always be content? Doesn't that seem lazy? You know there are other problems to tackle other than your pillars of the past, of which are entirely immovable. Ah, maybe there's a key there. If the pillars of the past are immovable, and you're currently building future pillars of the past in the present, doesn't that reveal a certain strength of which your humanity gives to the present? And in that case, the future? It's almost as if your actions are time travelers and that they will always be shaping the world around you no matter how deep and lost below they sink.

This gives memories the quality of diamonds in a sense. Some may be rough and

almost unknowable while others are fine cut and precious. If you think the memory is fine cut, hold on to it if you believe that suits you best. If you find a memory that's rough, it's probably better not to change it, but if you try, you might find it was one of the most beautiful memories that you left out and once you've cut it and found this out, you'll hold to it forever if you value it enough.

As for the oncoming chances to find new precious rocks in time, well, that's up to you to decide how you're going to cut what you've discovered.

Avery Roderick

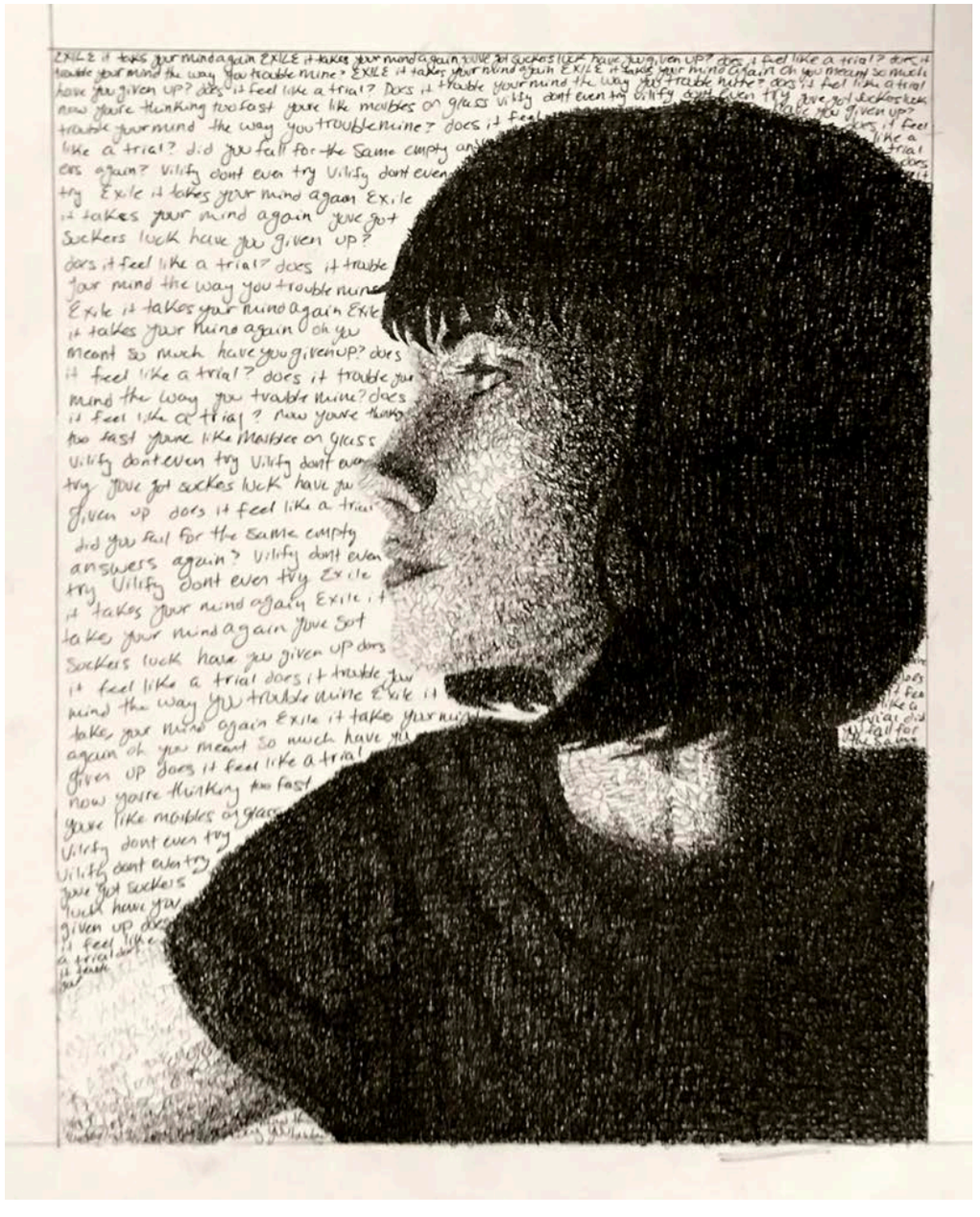
Untitled

Digitally Altered Photograph

JoJo Kirkham

Exile: It Takes Your Mind Again

Ink on Paper


EXILE it takes your mind again EXILE it takes your mind again
Exile it takes your mind again Exile
it takes your mind again
Suckers luck have you given up?
does it feel like a trial? does it trouble
your mind the way you trouble mine?
Exile it takes your mind again EXILE
it takes your mind again oh you
meant so much have you given up? does
it feel like a trial? does it trouble you
mind the way you trouble mine? does
it feel like a trial? now you're thinking
too fast you're like marbles on glass
Vilify don't even try Vilify don't even
try you've got suckers luck have you
given up does it feel like a trial
did you fall for the same empty
answers again? Vilify don't even
try Vilify don't even try Exile
it takes your mind again Exile it
takes your mind again you've got
suckers luck have you given up does
it feel like a trial does it trouble you
mind the way you trouble mine Exile it
takes your mind again Exile it takes your mind
again oh you meant so much have you
given up does it feel like a trial
now you're thinking too fast
you're like marbles on glass
Vilify don't even try
Vilify don't even try
you've got suckers
luck have you
given up does
it feel like
a trial does
it trouble

Third Prize - Poetry

Thayer Cumings

In the Shade

Even left out to dry in the sun,
no longer hidden under a mask of calm
and cool shadows, I tremble.

Bitter,
a cool that would produce numb
with a shift of the breeze.
And yet I still search for it in

every hollow heartbeat,
or empty set of eyes.

A glass clinks atop a table
just too loud
and a rush comes through;
sweat as cold as snow

drips.

A raised voice across a room prompts
fawn or flight,
but never fight,

and hands still shake,
as if they never warmed.

Ryan Funkhouser

Self-Portrait

Acrylic on Paper

Third Prize - Fiction

Dan Weston

Morning Ritual

He checked his watch, 6:15 am. He was on schedule.

The stakes were too high to miss another day at work. His bank account sat empty, rent was due, and he was on his own.

His eyes shifted as he considered himself in the mirror. His soft, gaunt face was reddened from his morning shave. His trimmed, thin, gray tipped hair clung to his scalp. He smoothed his Oxford shirt to his sunken chest with age-spotted hands. The crisp lines of his slacks appeased his mind. As his eyes settled on his loafers, he noticed a small imperfection. Puzzlement permeated into his mind. Last night his shoes were spotless as he tucked them beneath today's clothing.

With a slight twitch of his left eye, he knelt, wet his finger, and buffed the marred spot. Standing, he measured himself in the mirror and brushed the front of his shirt. Confirming his shoes were scuff-free, he turned and walked towards the door. He stopped at the threshold of the bedroom and twisted to look back at the blank mirror. With a deep breath, he turned and flipped off the lights.

He checked his watch, 6:24 am.

He walked through the galley kitchen and picked up his wallet from the small dining table. Passing into the brightly lit foyer, he paused to survey the contents of the adjoining living room. A damp smell infiltrated from the half-buried basement windows. The room was cramped with his writing desk, two reading chairs, and an ornamental bar hutch cabinet. The contents of the hutch were arranged in neat, categorized rows. Imported whiskeys on the left gave way to dark rums on the right. Fifteen years ago, his willpower had been fleeting, and the bottles became his closest allies against the agony of his mind. Now they stood dust-covered and alone, beckoning him to reenlist.

Shaking his head, he refocused and slipped into his silk-lined blazer. Stooping down, his hand found his ragged briefcase. He was comforted by the knowledge that the briefcase would be in the same location every morning. The handle conformed to his hand. He rubbed the leather handle between his fingers and thumb.

His therapist urged him to retire the briefcase. The switch to electronic data entry made it obsolete. There was no longer any reason to transport documents in hard-copy. Yet parting with a gift from his mother was an impossibility.

He checked his watch, 6:36 am.

His mind twisted into knots as he eyed the doorknob. His head rolled back as he strained to control the onslaught of thoughts. With annoyance, he set the briefcase down and returned the blazer to the hanger. He hurried towards the kitchen. He knew that he placed his wallet on the table every night as he passed through the kitchen to his bedroom. Today, he must have missed it on his way out of the kitchen, distracted by the bedroom lights.

He began to sweat as he ran his hand across the tiled edges of the table. The table was empty. After his panic became manageable, he reached towards his back pocket. There he felt a reassuring bulge and exhaled. He set his wallet on the table.

Moving through the kitchen, he flipped on the bedroom lights and stepped across the tightly-piled carpet. Perfectionistic doubt invaded his mind. Since childhood, his mother demanded that he consider his appearance and its reflection on her. He examined the mirror. Everything was in order.

Flicking off the bedroom lights, he moved to the kitchen and took his wallet. Wavering briefly, noticing the starchiness from last night's meal, he glanced at the stove and confirmed that no indicator lights were illuminated. He walked into the foyer, eased his right arm through the blazer, angled his left arm, and shrugged it onto his shoulders. Stooping down, he secured his briefcase and stood facing the door.

He checked his watch, 6:48 am.

He lifted his keys from their hook. His mind exploded with torment, freezing him mid- movement. Everything was still on in the bedroom. The old wiring would quickly lead to trouble if unattended. Hastily, he proceeded to set his briefcase down and remove his blazer. He lay his wallet on the empty table, eyed the stove, and entered the darkened room. He relaxed. He turned on the lights.

He established that his shoes were pristine in front of the mirror, flattened the front of his shirt, and left the room as he extinguished the lights.

He checked his watch, 6:57 am.

He passed back through the kitchen, picked up the wallet, and stood in the foyer. He put on his blazer, picked up his briefcase, grabbed his keys, and opened the door. Terrifying impulses shot through his body. His heart accelerated with the realization that the stove was still on. There would be a fire within minutes of him leaving.

Shutting and locking the door, he returned his keys to the rack, set his briefcase down, removed his blazer, and anxiously made his way back to the kitchen. He entered the kitchen, dropped his wallet on the table, and stepped towards the stove. His shoulders released as he registered that everything was normal. Composing himself, he rhythmically touched each burner to confirm their status. Turning, he left the kitchen.

His uneasiness with the stove recently occupied his mind. Previously, his mother tended to his needs and advocated for his perfection. She would serve breakfast at 5:30 am. For dinner, she would have his plate of seasoned chicken and wild rice precisely arranged. In the evenings, she would position his journal atop his desk, ready for his daily entry. A best-seller and a cup of tea awaited him on his nightstand to calm his nerves. Life was bearable with her around. Now, medication and therapy could not soothe his grief and unnerving independence.

He checked his watch, 7:04 am.

Back in front of the mirror, his shirt and slacks were perfect. His shoes were spotless. With a quieter mind, he turned off the lights and exited the bedroom. Confirming by touch that each burner was off, he pocketed his wallet and passed through the kitchen. He stood in the foyer, slipped on his blazer, retrieved his briefcase, unhooked his keys,

gripped the worn doorknob, and opened the door.

He checked his watch, 7:12 am.

Stepping into the hallway, he closed the door. He pivoted, and his forehead fell hard against the discolored wood. He counted to four as he inhaled and slowly let his breath out to an eight second count. His therapist had taught him this technique. After four cycles, he felt he had control over the situation. He turned the bolt and removed the key.

He squeezed his eyes shut and felt his thoughts waging war against his will. Behind his eyelids, he could see the horror within his apartment. The lights flickered. The stove burned. His wallet's contents were strewn about the floor. His fountain pen seeped through his journal. His bed was unmade. His wardrobe was in disarray. He couldn't halt the tsunami.

He let out an audible whimper. The key slid back into the lock.

It couldn't happen again. His absences at work were mounting since his mother's death. His hand gripped the doorknob. He had to make it to work. The monotony of transcribing testimonials gave him control and purpose.

"I am in control. I am in control. I am in control…" he murmured. "Please don't let me go back in," he pleaded.

He removed the key and pushed back from the door.

Physical space now separated him from the chaos of his apartment.

He checked his watch, 7:30 am. He was on schedule.

He would escape the building.

The 8:15 am bus would take him across town to the law firm's headquarters. He would arrive at 9:00 am. A feeling of pride warmed him as he made his way to the stairs.

Chrissie Amber Arcilla

Cherry Blossoms

Wire and Tissue Paper

Nazly ElShankankiry

Tunnel Vision

Digital Design

Poetry

Yasmin Slimani

6:30pm:

6:30pm:

The gold rays after a white light.

I wait 23 and half hours for these 30 minutes.

Illuminated, I stand wrapped around the arms of the sun

As I look down at the warmth on my arms, my skin is tainted gold by the mark of her grasp

Don't let go.

Fiction

Owen Conway

Winter Soul vs the Demon Plant

The seven elders of Valley Creek: Ron, Leon, Richard, Smith, Bob, Jackson and the "first among equals" Frank, gathered one afternoon at the village meeting hall to figure out what to do about the illness that has struck Samantha, Frank's eight-year-old granddaughter. Four days ago, Samantha was playing by the creek west of the village when she found an odd and pretty flower that was a deep shade of black. Samantha, in pursuit of her dream to become an herbalist just like her mother, wanted to take the flower home to find out what kind of plant it was. Half an hour after returning home Samantha became deeply ill, for it was discovered by Samantha's mother, Frank's daughter, to be Black Rosemary, a toxic plant that kills within a week. The only known cure was the sap of a plant that was dangerous in a far different way, the thinking man-eating Demon Plant.

The good news was there was a demon plant in a limestone cave in the eastern part of the valley, but there was no one in the village who could fight the evil plant. They could ask the king, but the village of Valley Creek was not on the king's good side due to below normal tribute last year. And even if that was not the case, the kingdom's levies were raised for a crusade against the Northman. The only other option was to hope that a knight-errant would see the flyer and its low monetary reward in the village's inn. Now that it had been four days, the elders had to vote to send a messenger to the king. It would take a day to travel to the king's court then they must do whatever the king told them, even if it was cruel and unusual. They must vote on this now or by noon tomorrow; otherwise Samantha would die in three days.

Right before the vote was cast the wooden door to the meeting hall opened. Standing in the doorway was a tan, muscular redheaded man with a beard. He was wearing nothing but brown fur boots, a brown fur loin cloth with a large and ornate black leather belt, a black leather harness with four straps and a red cloth cape. On the man's right side was a holster with a broadsword in it. The elders realized right away that the man standing in front of them was a Northman. They wondered what would happen now. The Northman spoke in a surprisingly soft voice at odds with his appearance, "My name is Winter-Soul. I am here for the job on the flyer." Frank got up from his chair to tell Winter-Soul in detail about the cave, its location, and how Winter-Soul needed to bring the sap by sunrise the next day. He then handed Winter-Soul a glass jar.

When Winter-Soul exited the meeting hall, Richard moved up from his chair and walked to Frank. Richard said, "If the king finds out…"

Frank replied, "So, if he can't get the sap by sunrise, we can assume he was killed by the plant; what harm would come to my granddaughter if a Northman tried to save her?"

After walking a little over an hour Winter-Soul arrived outside the cave with the Demon Plant. It was now the start of the evening twilight when the sky was a dark blue, but not yet dark as night. The cave's opening looked pitch black, yet there was a something making a green light in the black void. Winter-Soul walked into that very void.

As he walked several yards past the entrance into the cave, vines appeared rooted in the limestone walls and floor. The vines glowed so brightly that his costume now had a faint green tint. Several yards later, yellow glowing flowers grew on the vines that somehow were both alive and dead at the same time. As he approached a turn in the cave, a deep and loud voice called out, "Drop your sword, or bad things will happen." Winter-Soul stopped for a second to think about what to do and then put the broadsword down on the side of the wall and moved forward.

As Winter-Soul turned around the bend, he saw the source of the voice, the vines, and the light. Three yards from him was a large green and red fly trap. Like the flowers, it glowed and appeared to be between life and death. The plant was next to a pillar, above the plant a star-filled cenote. Winter-Soul moved towards the plant, and it asked, "Why are you're here?" Winter-Soul responded, "A child in the nearby village is sick with an illness, and only your sap can cure the child. What do I have to do to get the sap from you?" The plant uttered, "Nothing," in a happy tone.

Winter-Soul felt something around his legs; he looked and saw that small vines were around his legs, and the plant bended its neck towards the Northman. When the plant was a yard from him, Winter-Soul quickly took off his cape, twisted it and then tied the cape around the plant's neck. While grappling the plant, Winter-Soul used his other hand to tie the other end of the cape to the pillar. The plant started to shake and the vines on Winter-Soul loosened. He then went back into the passage to get the broadsword. Then he returned and made a small cut to extract the sap from the plant. Untying his cape, he walked out of the cave into the night.

The elders were surprised to see him in the meeting hall the next morning. Winter-Soul was sitting at the table with the nectar next to him. An hour later Samantha was given a dosage of a formula made by her mother with the nectar. By noon Samantha was walking and seemed cured. Around the same time Winter-Soul went to the hall of elders to ask if he could live in the village, saying "This village needs someone to help protect it." For about five minutes the seven debated the effects of such a decision. All the elders but Richard voted to allow Winter-Soul to live in the village.

Poetry

Sayara Uprety

Big Dreams

Holding the big dreams in these eyes,
Trying to fly all above the skies,
Came to this strange world all alone
Dreaming to be a girl full of wise.

Tackling with everything here I knew,
Gotta lot of things in life to pursue,
The whole movie is yet to cast
All I've seen is just a preview.

Passing through slippery roads at this age,
Widening my life book with a new page,
Constellating a new experience every passing day
Wanna earn a triumph on a big stage.

Keeping a big smile on this face,
Learning the new things in the new place,
Though physically weak; but mentally strong
Gonna be the winner in the life race.

Patricia Cardozo

Untitled

Charcoal on Paper

Rocio Guzman

Anxiety

Digital Photograph

Poetry

Jessica Weiss

Home

the greatest poets write sonnets
about how they get lost in their lover's eyes
and I can't understand
how I'm meant to look at you
and see anything but home

Sebastian Fox

Breakfast

Collage and Acrylic on Canvas

Poetry

Dee Shirley

Love Returned

We sat on the windswept beach
While the bubbles from the champagne died.
You without your ring.
Me without my pride.

We clung to teenage memories
Long ago from another life
And felt the sand between us slip away
Like your hand beneath my thigh.

The stars resembled fireflies
Flickering full of light,
Fluttering like the butterflies
We both felt that night.

Finally, you leaned in–
My breath cut short from the kiss–
You spoke so soft I could barely hear
If you had a favorite moment, it was this.

The thunder of her footsteps so sudden
As she cried out your name.
The sand beneath us now solid
From the tide it had reclaimed.

I watched you hold her,
An apology tinged with spite.
You warned her this would happen
She could not make it right.

Why does the memory of our youth
Return with the breaking tide–
A moment thirty years ago,
Still fueling love deep inside?

There were so many might have beens,
What ifs that were never buried,

Other worlds, other dreams,
Torches that we carried.

The memory persisted unrequited
Forever love unsent,
Knowing life would be happier
When things could be different.

Meghan Rock

Fancy Gathering

Oil on Canvas

Alejandro Melgar

Self-Portrait in Grays

Acrylic on Paper

Gabrianna Hite

Purple Flower

Colored Pencil on Bristol Board

Poetry

Thayer Cumings

Mirror or Other

I escaped your grasp
that held me still,
choking the only hope
I possessed.

I slipped away as
you attempted to force
me to stay

Who were you then,
or who have you become?
You have spent your existence,

the existence with me,
somewhere between being
and not.

You somehow missed
the fake smiles I so obviously
learned from you. Our only
likeness coming from

our sunken eyes and
shrinking waists and
bulging veins,

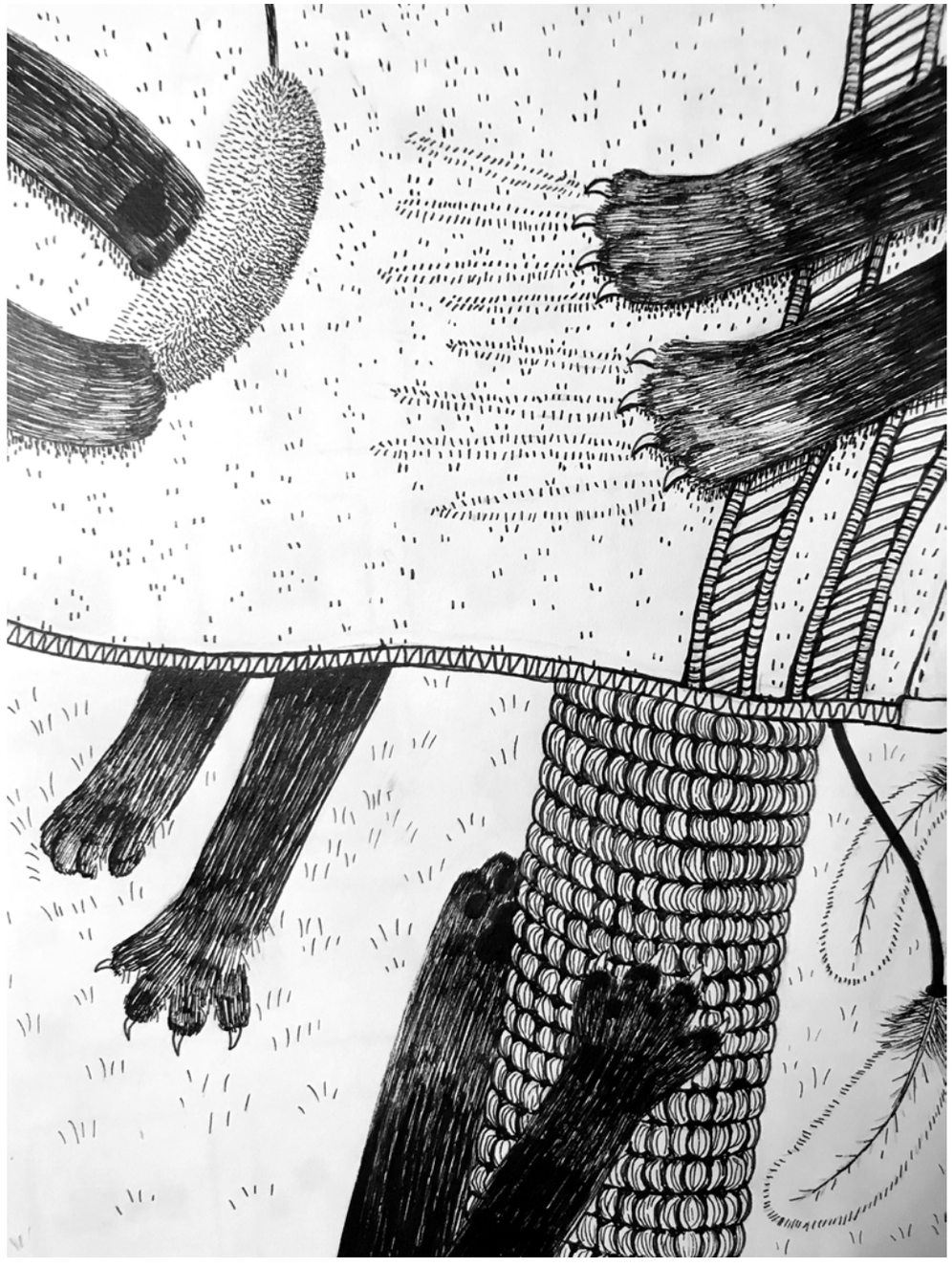
or the syrup dripping from our words,
staining the same shade of rust.

The shattered glass coming from
my dearest mirror,
mother.

Audrey Clark

Pawing Side B

Ink on Paper



Marjan Hamidi

Persian Art

Acrylic on Canvas

Poetry

Jessica Weiss

More Than a Crossroad

Have you ever been homesick
for a life you haven't lived?
Or a world
not your own?

Have you ever looked
down the path you didn't take,
and mourned for what you lost?
Because you know it would've been better,
or happier,
than this?

You move
farther down this road you claimed.
Your tears fall,
and you scream with each painful step—
But you reach the end.

Another crossroads.

You choose better this time.
It doesn't stop hurting but-
that's fine.
Because you keep the ache,
tucked away in your chest and—
it reminds.
        it follows.
                it's a part of you now.

You might be stronger than before.

Poetry

Pari Sabti

Zardi-ye Man Az To

Yellow of the sun
couldn't compare
to your gold.
What a radiant
smile you had,
dripping honey and
warmth.

When it comes to me,
we call it sickly yellow:
my skin when I'm feverish,
my vomit in the dead
of night.

~~you never said anything~~
~~why didn't you say anything~~
~~I thought you were bright~~
~~why didn't you tell me~~
~~you were scared~~
~~tell me~~

please

~~just tell me~~

Maadar, maamaan, mama,
an indecipherable book right to the epilogue.
Your shattered picture against the yellow wall;
I scream "bargard[1]."
You don't say "nemitoonam[2]."
You don't say anything.

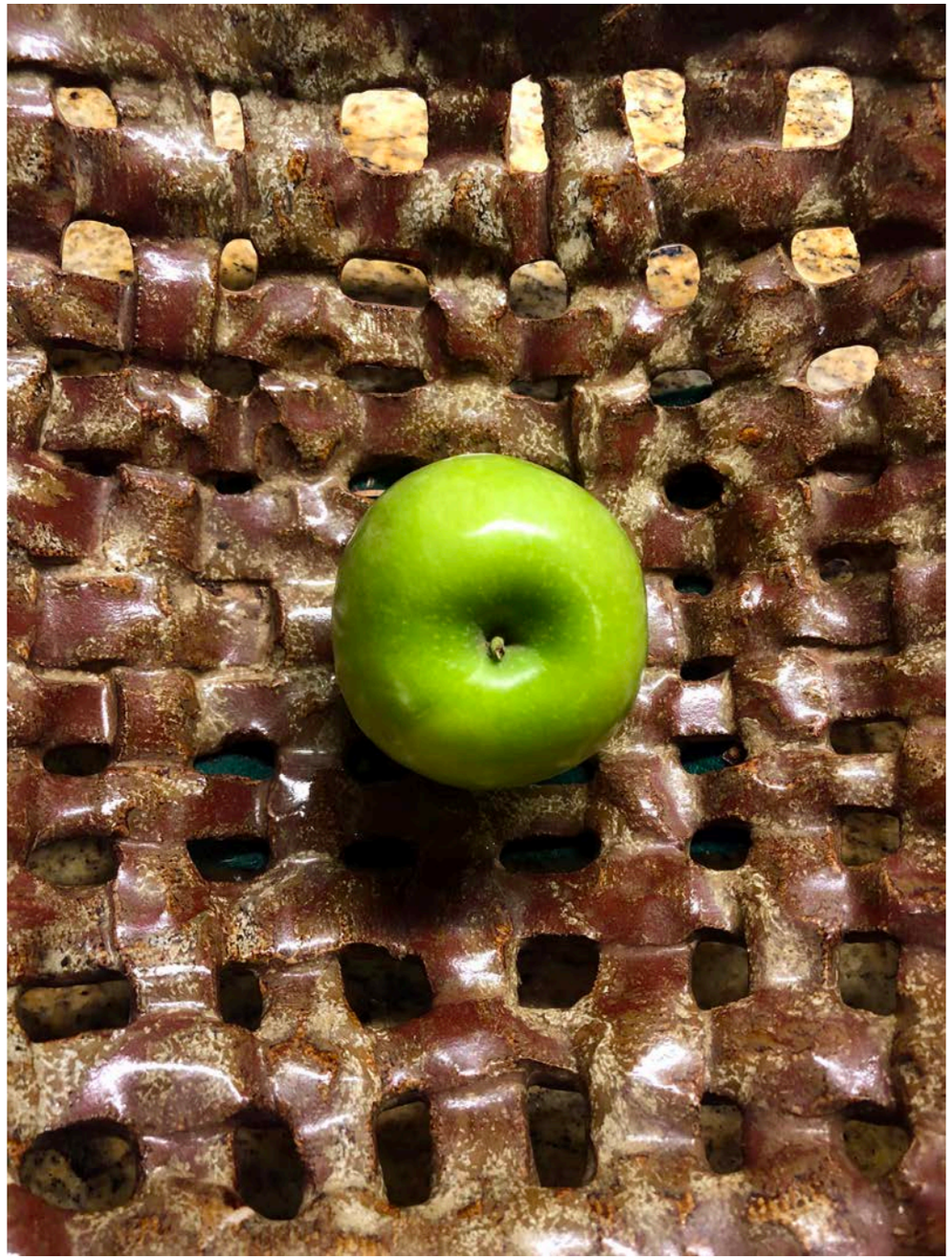
I always thought we'd bury you on a sunny day
surrounded by your favorite yellow carnations,
but you were wearing black
and it rained on my scars.

1. "Come back" 2. "I can't"

Catie Worley

Apple Of My Eye

Digital Photograph



Tricia Dahal

Goose in Burke Lake

Digital Photograph

Iyanna Karim

Chair and Draping Cloth

Charcoal on Paper

Naimahya Boyd

Hands

Conte Crayon on Paper

Poetry

Dee Shirley

Transparent

They didn't see me.
When I was the youngest
In competition with my sister
With hair like rusty water
She was everyone's favorite
While I was quiet and moody.

They didn't see me.
Later, I was in between
On one side youth
The other beauty.
Always in the background
Quiet and moody.

He didn't see me.
I was hidden
Beneath my sister's shadow
She was the sparkle in his voice
When he said her name
But mine was quiet and moody.

Would they see me?
First a wife,
Then a mother.
Performing wifely duties for one,
While nourishing the other.
Still, quiet and moody.

They don't see me.
In the house now
Just me and him.
He at one end of the sofa
Me the other
Both, quiet and moody.

He sees me.
With eyes of blue

He brings me butterflies
Familiar from my days of youth
Long ago memories
When I was not so quiet and moody.

He doesn't see me anymore.
The flash of passion gone
His eyes of blue
Dimmed to gray
As the heat we felt
Turned, quiet and moody

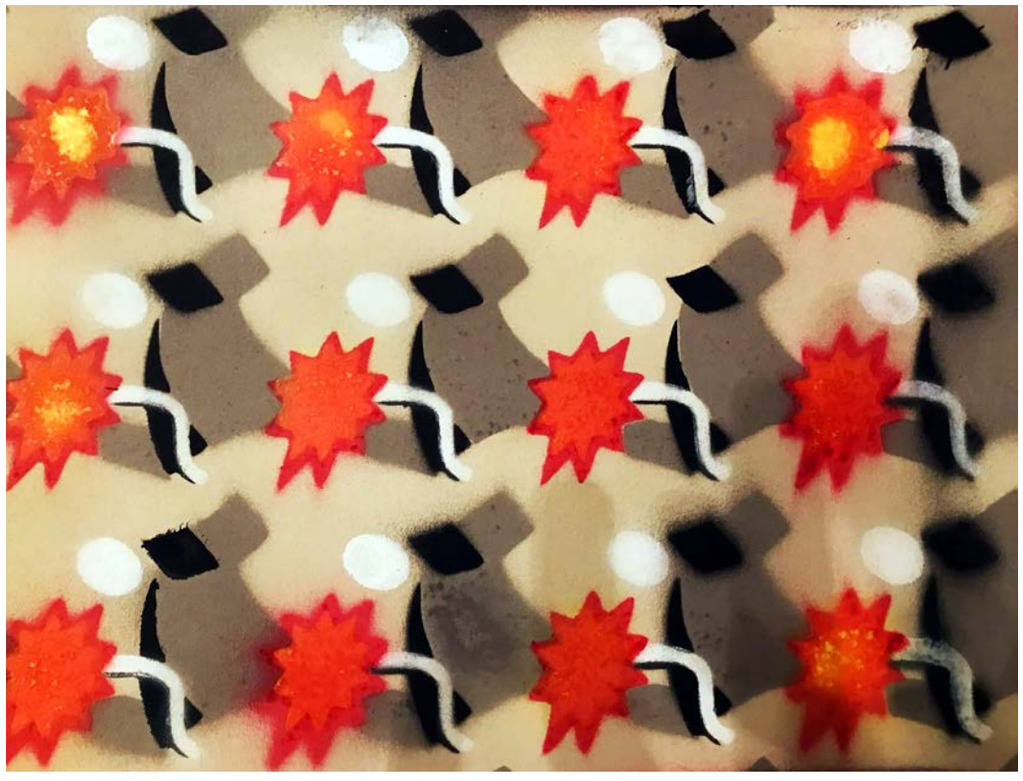
Will they see me now?
It is what I fear the most.
But a razor blade to my flesh
Has finally dissolved this cloak.
Now they see that I am not
Just quiet and moody.

They see me.
They watch afraid
Of what I may do
Even within these padded walls
Sitting alone in this room
Seen, yet quiet and moody.

Ethan Walker

Bombs

Spray Paint on Paper



Adam Castro

Demand of Color

Pastel on Paper

Poetry

Jessica Wells

The Life of a College Student

Immediately woken up to the sound of her alarm.
5 am flashes across her phone.
The pressure of getting perfect grades awakes with her.
Constant thought of ruining her life if she doesn't get a degree.
Anxiety and depression seem to be part of her life now.
This is The Life of A College Student.

Arriving on campus headphones in her ear.
Music blasting as if she were at a concert.
Headed to the cause of her anxiety.
Also known as class.
She knows that she needs to put on a mask.
Nowadays a mask is no longer a metaphor.
This is The Life of A College Student.

At every family gathering the talk of the future is inevitable.
Aunts and uncles constantly ask questions and impose their unwanted opinions.
“So what are you majoring in?”
“Do you know how much school that requires?”
“That job doesn’t make you a lot of money.”
“You do know that is impossible right?”
This is The Life of A College Student.

Society holds a college degree to a high standard.
Getting a degree means intelligence.
The only people who think this are those who never went to college.
This is no longer what it means.
A degree equals a future job.
This false idea only puts money in the pockets of greedy college admissions.
This is The Life of A College Student.

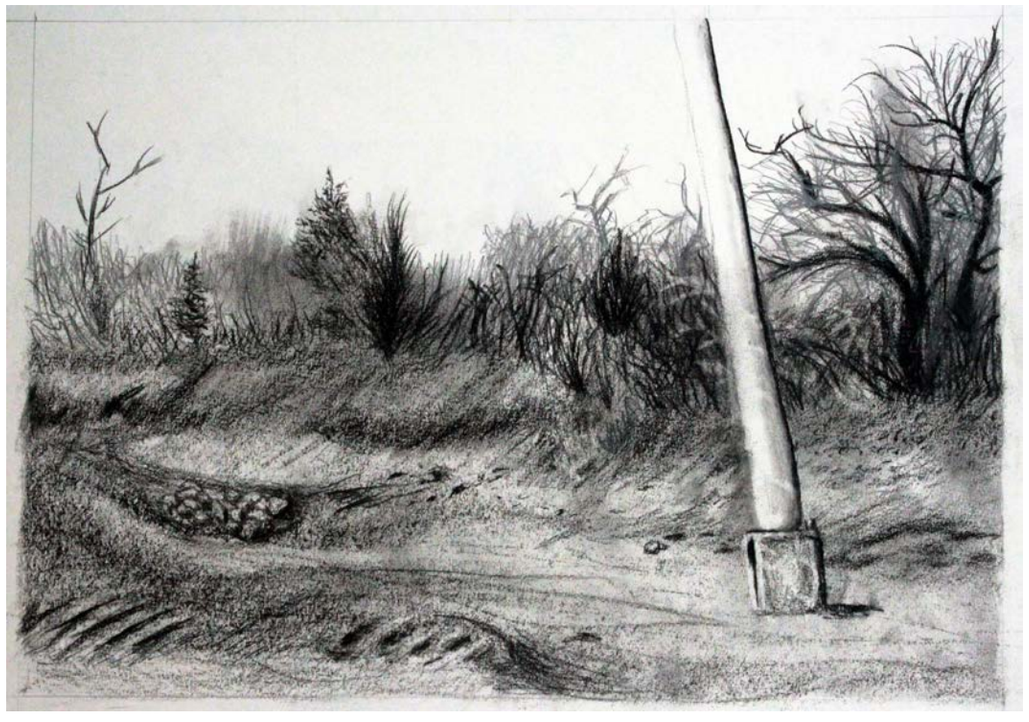
Each day feels as though it is one.
Wednesday feels like Saturday.
Emails everyday adding more unnecessary tasks.
Each task being a straw on her back.
Soon one of those straws will be the one to break her back.
Dropping out becomes more and more tempting as the semesters continue.

This is The Life of A College Student.

Zander Young

Suburban Roadside

Charcoal on Paper



Natalie McCarter

Portrait

Charcoal on Paper

Poetry

Jessica Weiss

Our Love is Not a Tragedy

Golden is the light within your chest
that I compare you to the sun.

If you are Apollo;
does that make me
Icarus?
He, who came too close
and left burned?
He, who loved
too fast,
too much,
and so fell
into the unforgiving sea?

No.
I think not.

I think,
I'm far more suited
to the waves
that push and drag at the petty mortal
who dared try and take
what was not theirs

I think,
I am She, who kisses you as you touch the horizon-
who wishes you good night and good morning-
who reflects the best parts of you-
because you are the most incredible thing I've ever seen

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